

# The Role of Brief Reports in Peer-Reviewed Journals

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## Abstract

The prevalent emphasis on the length of academic papers can compromise the quality and relevance of scholarly research. Such an undue focus often results in overlooking valuable insights that may not conform to conventional paper-length criteria. This article advocates for the recognition and utilization of brief reports in academic publishing. These reports, characterized by their conciseness, ensure that valuable findings are disseminated without the need for unnecessary elaboration. Five types of brief reports are highlighted: Conceptual Papers, which present hypotheses based on preliminary data; Case Studies, which provide insights from specific events; Viewpoints, offering unique perspectives from scholars based on their experiences or affiliations; Literature Reviews, offering exhaustive and current overviews on specific topics; and Technical Reports, which bridge the gap between academia and practical applications. Emphasizing the value and brevity of content, rather than length, can enhance the richness and diversity of academic literature, benefiting the entire communication research community.

*Key Words: Brief report, Academic publishing*

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Too often, an individual scholar's benchmark for quality academic scholarship includes the unnecessary expectation for each paper to be lengthy. As a PhD student, I remember PhD candidates scrambling to make their dissertations as long as possible, hitting arbitrary page-length goals. I also remember being at a conference and overhearing a faculty member boasting to his students about the length of his own dissertation. This focus on length is both unnecessary and can have a negative impact on the quality of academic research. "Unfortunately, instead of enhancing your article, overwhelming details may become a distraction to your readers" (Surprenant, 2022, p. 1).

One of the existing remedies to this convolution is the brief report. A brief report can take many forms, as outlined below. But each version of the brief report has an essential similarity, which is brevity. Brief reports allow scholars the opportunity to publish important and valuable findings without having to go through the arduous and unnecessary task of lengthening a manuscript to fit a journal's expectations.

The key to any brief report however, is that it does provide obvious value to scholars in the field. While the bar for manuscript length is lowered, the bar for academic excellence should not be.

## Brief Report Types

Five brief report types are listed below. However, this should not be considered an exhaustive list.

### Conceptual Papers

A conceptual paper focuses on a researcher's developing hypothesis using preliminary, or even incomplete data. The paper may also focus on a finding that is part of a larger research project, and may not be properly highlighted in a longer-length article. One example of a conceptual brief report comes from Chung, Lee, & Keum (2023). In less than 3,500 words, these authors successfully and concisely explain their study about the association of online hate and social norms. The paper quickly manages to provide valuable information to the communication research community.

### Case Studies

The case study is a common form of academic writing, often focusing on a single event, or series of events. In these types of papers, there is something valuable to learn from the episode. For example, crisis communication publications are often focused on specific events that can be classified as a crisis. These case studies can convey the appropriate information rather briefly, like Benoit's (2018) analysis of an incident with United Airlines, which was written in less than 3,000 words.

### Viewpoints

Viewpoint articles often don't look like traditional articles, in that they take a different approach. Oftentimes a scholar will have a very unique, but valuable perspective because of their previous experience, geographical location, relationships with important actors, etc. Being able to publish and archive these unique outlooks can have great value to other researchers. Therefore, even though these types of articles don't usually have a great deal of accompanying data, they can still benefit the field. For example, a recent publication about the problematic integration theory (Kwitonda & Babrow, 2023) features co-author Austin Babrow, the scholar that introduced the theory to the field. His unique viewpoint on this theory provides an obvious value that other scholars cannot replicate.

### Literature Reviews

While literature reviews are often only one piece of the puzzle when putting together a manuscript, occasionally a review of literature that is both exhaustive and current can provide value to the field completely on its own. For example, Porismita Borah (2011) completed a systematic review of all literature surrounding framing

theory, which served as a great starting point for many framing studies for several years, resulting in over 1,000 citations.

### Technical Reports

Finally, technical reports represent the applied side of communication research, giving practitioners an opportunity to publish their findings from experiences and projects that are happening outside of academia. These reports can be especially beneficial in integrated communication marketing fields. For instance, Bright and Bagley (2017) published a report on the work that was completed for the Gulf States Health Policy Center. The report is very practical in its application, and yet serves as a great resource for those working in similar fields.

### Conclusion

As long as value is not deserted, brief reports are an underutilized resource in the field of communication. There exists so much precious information that has not cracked the academic pipeline because it does not do well in the traditional research format. If publishers and authors both made brief reports a more common approach to dissemination, the communication research community would greatly benefit.

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